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THE DEMOCRATIC IDEAL IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS¹

BAINBRIDGE COLBY

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THE supreme concern of mankind is justice. This is the aspiration of democracy, not only in its internal but in its international relations. Justice not only demanded for ourselves but freely accorded to others.

This is the keynote of President Wilson's epoch-making appeal to the nations of the world. This immortal address constitutes not only a satisfactory declaration of the principles for which we entered the Great War, but it is the latest and most authentic expression of the spirit of democracy. The inviolability of treaties, respect for nationality, the right of development along self-evolved and national lines, obedience to the promptings of humanity, in other words, international justice—these are the salients of his definition of democracy's aims and of the democratic ideal in international relations.

But nations are animated not only by theories but by conditions. And it is well for us to remember that a nobly defined ideal does not necessarily meet or vanquish a robust and persistent condition. The issue of the Great War is familiarly defined as between autocracy or militarism on the one hand, and democracy on the other. But militarism or even autocracy, odious as they are, are only different lines of approach to, or treatment of underlying conditions in the world.

I think it may fairly be said that the ailment which afflicts the world is economic and not exclusively political. The trouble with the highly industrialized nations of the temperate zone is that they cannot produce what they need to consume, and they cannot consume what they need to produce. The populations of the industrial nations are steadily growing.

¹ Address delivered at the National Conference on Foreign Relations of the United States, held under the auspices of the Academy of Political Science, at Long Beach, N. Y., May 29, 1917.

The nations of western Europe in a century have doubled their population. Germany is adding a million per annum to her population, and the United States even more. The nations of western Europe cannot produce the means required for their subsistence. They have not the agricultural basis which yields them their requirements in food and raw materials. These indispensables of national life must be obtained beyond their borders. They must, in other words, be purchased, and the means necessary to the purchase are manufactured products, which must greatly exceed in amount what the domestic market of the producing nation can absorb. From this universal need of nations, i. e., food and raw materials on the one hand, and a market for products on the other, arises the value of colonial possessions, particularly in the unexploited and highly productive regions in the tropics and the orient.

These regions are in large part peopled by nations whose titles to the lands they hold are unassailable, yet the people are lacking either in industry or ambition, and the productive possibilities of their lands are incapable of realization unless the popular energies are marshaled and directed and even supplemented by the more progressive and colonizing nations. The world needs their produce, the life of Europe demands their raw materials, and mere rights of nations can with difficulty make a stand against necessities that are so imperious. There has thus arisen an economic imperialism, of which, strange to say, the most democratic of nations are the most conspicuous examples. England throughout the world, France in Africa and the East, are deeply conscious of the relation to their industrial vigor of colonial expansion.

Economic advantage seems to follow in the wake of political control. It is the mother country which builds the railroads in the colonies, controls port privileges, fixes tariffs and secures to her nationals the out-distancing advantages which make alien competition impossible. Theoretically this may not be true, but in practice it is uniformly true. Of Algeria's exportations seventy-nine per cent are to France, and eighty-five per cent of her imports come from France.

As the industrial nation grows in population, the pressure upon her means of sustenance increases, her need of raw materials grows greater, and she turns a ranging eye throughout the world for the means of satisfying this internal pressure.

Here is the motive of wars, here is the menace to world peace. And it is with reference to this condition, prevalent throughout the world, that we must determine the attitude of democracy in its international relations.

This economic pressure is but beginning to be felt in the United States, but its premonitory symptoms are already seen. It is only a question of time when our complacent sense of security will give way to a realization that our vast agricultural basis is not vast enough to sustain our even vaster industrial development. We shall then feel, if not so acutely as sister nations in the east, at least as truly, the need of expanding markets and enlarged sources of raw materials, if not of food.

The spiritual aims of democracy, so perfectly defined by the President, will have to encounter the imperious economic necessities which drive all nations, which cannot be stayed, and which refuse to be silenced. The freedom of the seas, respect for international boundaries, observance of treaties, obedience to international law, recognition of the dictates of humanity—in short, all the aims which animate America and her allies in this great war, do not in and of themselves contain the promise of a complete tranquillization of the world. To end wars requires that the sources of international friction should be reached. The repression of barbarism, the punishment of ruthlessness, constitute a sufficient but only an immediate objective of the world's struggle. It is, of course, the primary undertaking of civilization, and once achieved, our thought and our effort must go forward in aims that are more far reaching. Our goal must be the destruction of the economic root of war—in other words, to establish an economic, not only a political, internationalism, a community of interests, even if qualified and incomplete, among great nations. The American policy of the open door in colonial administration must find acceptance in the world if mankind is to emerge from the perennial menace of war.